



U.S. Department of Justice

Ronald C. Machen Jr.
*United States Attorney for the
District of Columbia*

*Judiciary Center
555 Fourth St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530*

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

For Information Contact:

Public Affairs

(202) 252-6933

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/dc/news/2011/apr/news.html>

District Man Pleads Guilty to Aggravated Assault, Other Charges in PCP-Related Car Crash - Defendant's 5 Year-Old Son Among Four Injured Victims -

WASHINGTON - Merl S. Howard Jr., 27, of Washington, D.C., has pled guilty to felony charges stemming from a traffic accident that took place in March 2011 while he was driving under the influence of alcohol and PCP, U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. announced.

Howard pled guilty on June 6, 2011 to charges of aggravated assault, attempted assault with a dangerous weapon, and assault with significant bodily injury. He is to be sentenced September 8, 2011 by the Honorable Heidi M. Pasichow in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. Howard faces up to 23 years of imprisonment. Under the court's voluntary sentencing guidelines, the likely range is between 4 ½ and 12 ½ years in prison.

According to the government's evidence, on the evening of March 17, 2011, Howard was celebrating his mother's birthday with her and friends. After leaving his mother's home, Howard obtained and consumed PCP. Then, while under the influence of PCP, Howard drove his mother's car to Sherman Circle NW, taking along his five-year-old son and another friend.

As he entered Sherman Circle, at about 9:30 p.m., Howard accelerated his speed to more than 50 miles per hour. His vehicle struck a parked car. Howard suffered minor injuries. But four others were more seriously hurt. An elderly couple was inside the parked car, talking to friends standing on the sidewalk. The woman in the parked car suffered abrasions to her mouth and face, contusions to the left side of her body, and a muscle tear in her shoulder. Her husband, who was sitting next to her, had to undergo heart surgery to correct a condition caused by the car crash.

Howard's son suffered multiple injuries, including fractures to his face and skull, brain swelling, a seizure, blood clotting, cerebral hemorrhaging, and a large laceration to his forehead. He was sedated by medical professionals for several days. Howard's other passenger, who was pregnant, suffered extensive abrasions that removed skin from her neck, among other injuries.

In announcing the guilty plea, U.S. Attorney Machen commended Detective Jeffrey Folts of the Metropolitan Police Department's (MPD) Major Crash Division who led the investigation, as well as Officers Clayton Bass, Clayton Smith, Charles Johnson, Kevin Rodriguez, Israel Ruiz, R.L. Simon, Ralph Nitz, and Mike Miller. U.S. Attorney Machen expressed his appreciation to the citizens of the Sherman Circle NW community, who assisted the United States Attorney's Office during its investigation. He also praised the work of Paralegal Jason Manuel and Legal Assistant Charmonique Price, who prepared the case for indictment, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Mervin Bourne, who conducted the pre-indictment investigation and prosecuted the case.

11-224

###